Muhammad Afzal Upal
Moderate Fundamentalists

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The Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama'at in the Lens of Cognitive Science of Religion

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1 Introduction

I grew up calling two men my father. In the West, where many people have a biological father and a step-father, this is not as unusual as it was in Pakistan where I grew up. I did not meet my biological father, Moulana Ali Haidar Upal Shaheed[1], until I was seven years old. The only contact with my father during my early childhood was his weekly letters and the occasional black and white photograph that he mailed us from West Africa where he was working as a missionary. My mother says that my primary motivation for learning to read was to be able to read *Abbijan's* (Urdu for father) letters on my own instead of having to beg her to read them to me. The older man in whose house we lived and whom I called *Abbaji* (also meaning father in Urdu) was actually my maternal grandfather. I called him Abbaji because my mother called him Abbaji. I also called my maternal grandmother *Ammiji* (Urdu for mother) following my mother (whom I called *Ammijan*, also meaning mother). Rather than correcting me, my grandparents took pleasure in my childish behavior perhaps because they didn't have a son of their own. In the fiercely patriarchal Pakistani culture not having a son is almost as bad as being childless.

Abbaji, my grandfather, had been a proud man in his youth. He was the first one in his village to go to college and the first one in his family to learn English. He graduated as an overseer from an engineering college and worked as a public servant first for the government of British India and then Pakistan. An estimated twelve million Hindus and Muslims died during the ethnic cleansing that followed the partition of the Indian subcontinent into India and Pakistan in 1947. My grandfather who was born and bred in East Punjab followed most Eastern Punjabi Muslims in abandoning his ancestral home for Western Punjab which became part of Pakistan. He avoided the fate of six million Indian Muslims, who were killed by Hindu and Sikh mobs during their ill-fated journeys to Pakistan, in part because he was a member of the well-organized *Ahmadiyya Muslim Community*[2]. Caravans of Ahmadi trucks moved together, sometimes under police protection, carrying thousands of Ahmadis from their headquarters in the East Punjabi village of Qadian to the West Punjabi city of Lahore, which became part of Pakistan.

Once in Pakistan, the Indian refugees were offered a chance to claim properties in Pakistan abandoned by Hindus and Sikhs in lieu of the properties they had left behind in India. The head of the Ahmadiyya Community, known as the *Khalifa* (Arabic for Caliph[3])-Allah's infallible viceroy on earth, advised Ahmadis against abandoning their Indian properties because Allah would soon victoriously return Ahmadis to Qadian-the small village where their faith had been born a bare half-century earlier in 1889. This meant that Abbaji and thousands of other pious Ahmadis started their lives from scratch in the new country. Abbaji did well enough to buy a house in the city of Gojra where he raised his three daughters. When the Khalifa (whom Ahmadis affectionately call *Hazoor*, meaning honourable) founded the new Ahmadiyya headquarters on the barren western shores of Chenab river in the early 1950s, Abbaji bought a tract of land

there as his future retirement home. The modest home that he built in Rabwah came in handy when he decided to arrange for his middle daughter to marry an Ahmadiyya missionary school (called *Jamia Ahmadiyya*) student in 1967 who couldn't afford a home of his own.

Abbijan, my biological father, stood out among the Jamia students for a number of reasons, not the least of which was his age. In his mid-twenties, he was almost a decade older than some of his youngest class fellows. In order to become a Jamia student, one had to take a vow to offer all of one's capacities in the service of Hazoor without ever asking for anything in return. For a typical Jamia student, this was often done by the parents writing to Hazoor to seek his permission to offer their children to God. These students would then enter Jamia as soon as they finished their middle school. In order to induce their sons to keep their word to Hazoor, the parents would often promise to pay them a stipend for the rest of their lives. My paternal grandparents, who farmed in a small village in Sialkot, Pakistan, did not offer any of their six sons to the movement. Instead, they supported their second eldest son's decision to become the first person in the village to go to college and study sciences. After graduating with a degree in Physics and Mathematics, Abbijan took up a government job as a high school science teacher. It was after a few years of teaching that he received his calling from God and offered himself to the head of the community.

Because Abbijan had essentially neither any income of his own as a Jamia student nor a parental stipend, my mother had to work outside the house to support the family, an indignity for a middle-class Pakistani woman. This meant that as the movement sent my father from one Pakistani town to another following his graduation in 1970, my mother had to stay behind at her parent's house and close to her job. Thus, when I was born, it was Abbaji who wrote the letter to Hazoor (customarily written by father of the newborn) requesting him to bless the newborn with a name. Hazoor, perhaps thinking that the author of the letter (i.e., Abbaji named, Muhammad Sharif) was requesting a name for his own son, gave to me my grandfather's (and Prophet Muhammad's) first name and wrote with his own hands, "Muhammad Afzal, congratulations!" on Abbaji's postcard. More than forty six years have passed but that postcard is one of my mother's most prized possessions, not just because it is the first time my name was written, but also because it once touched the hands of Hazoor. "Afzal" can be either a comparative or superlative term in Arabic meaning better or best (depending on the context). Just as no English speaking parents would name their child Better/Best, Arabic speakers do not name their children Afzal!

By the time I was born, the persistent efforts of Ahmadi pioneers had managed to turn the inhospitable saline and rocky soils of Rabwah into the first planned city of Pakistan fulfilling the divine dream of Rabwah's founder, the second Ahmadi Khalifa (son of the founder of the Ahmadiyya Community who reigned from 1914 to 1966). The city of 40,000 entirely populated by Ahmadis served as the headquarters of the millions-strong worldwide Ahmadiyya Muslim Community. Unlike Qadian where Ahmadis had to cohabit with a large number of Hindus and Sikhs, Rabwah was a

city built from scratch by Ahmadis for Ahmadis. The Ahmadi officials, all personally appointed by Hazoor, not only served as spiritual guides but also as the city's civil administration. Rabwah was divided into about thirty precincts with a mosque serving as the focal point for each precinct. The community enforced complete gender segregation with separate schools and colleges for men and women. Women had to cover themselves from head to toe in a black *burka* with only their eyes showing when they had to leave their houses. The city had no cinemas because even Pakistani films promoted immorality by showing unveiled women. Anyone caught visiting cinemas in the neighbouring city of Chiniot (or caught violating any of the other numerous bans such as the ban against flying kites, the ban against males clapping publicly, the ban against celebrating birthdays, the ban against associating with non-Ahmadis e.g., by taking part in their weddings or funerals[4] etc.) was punished by excommunication and/or expulsion from Rabwah. To encourage people to attend the daily Islamic ritual prayer of *Fajr* (offered at pre-dawn) groups of boys and young men went around shouting "prayer is better than sleep" at pre-dawn hours in the streets of Rabwah. We, the residents of Rabwah, took great pride in our status as the most organized and the most disciplined of all Muslims who were ready to sacrifice our lives to ensure a fulfilment of God's eschatological plans of making Islam the dominant religion before the end of the world. At our weekly boys' association meetings (and later at men's association meetings, as I grew older), we eagerly chanted our pledge "to sacrifice my life, wealth, time and honour for the sake of our faith" and "for guarding the institution of Ahmadiyya Caliphate."

While the community sent my father to various parts of Pakistan and to other countries, we lived with my mother and maternal grandparents in Rabwah, where my mother taught at a girl's primary school. My father's first missionary appointments were in various Pakistani cities so he must have seen me on one of his visits home but I have no memory of that. When I became old enough to remember faces, he was working in the West African nation of Ghana (where Jama'at had sent him in 1973). I learned of my father's face from the few black and white photographs that he had mailed us from Africa. These pictures looked eerily similar to the author's picture on the back cover of the well-known Ahmadi Urdu book on the shroud of Turin. In his book, Hasan Muhammad Khan Sahib, a local celebrity, defended the heretical Ahmadiyya doctrinal position on Jesus' crucifixion. Imagine my surprise when I finally saw my father for the first time, at the age of 7, and he didn't look anything like Hasan Muhammad Khan Sahib! My father stayed with us in Rabwah for about six months before being sent to Mirpur Khas in Sindh province of Pakistan. The few times that I got to see my father between his various missionary assignments, I never heard him complain about having to sacrifice his family life. In fact, I heard countless times from him and from other Ahmadis that sacrifices for the community were the real cause of any success, however small, that our family had had. My good health, my good grades in school, and my success in constantly ongoing religious competitions in Rabwah were all a direct result of my father's missionary vows[5].

The early 1970s were a heady time for Ahmadis in Pakistan. Ahmadis believed that they had played a decisive role in the victory of the socialist Pakistan People's Party (PPP) in Pakistan's first elections based on universal suffrage held in December 1970[6]. They believed that PPP would pay them back for their support by allowing them to preach unmolested which, in their minds, could only lead to one outcome, namely, a quick acceptance of *Ahmadiyyat* (Arabic for Ahmadism) as true Islam first by all Pakistanis and then by the rest of the world. This elation turned into a deep sense of betrayal in 1974 when Prime Minister ZAB Bhutto capitulated to the Sunni mullahs demanding a constitutional amendment to declare Ahmadis non-Muslims. When Bhutto was hanged by the military in 1979, the atmosphere at the Annual Ahmadiyya Convention, that brought hundreds of thousands of Ahmadis from across the globe into Rabwah every year for a long weekend in December, was openly celebratory. There was a strong sense that prophecies predicting destruction of any worldly power that took on God's chosen people had been fulfilled in front of our eyes.

With the centennial of the community's founding only a decade away, we were eagerly anticipating people joining Ahmadiyyat in droves. I remember frequently running into the community's official historian Moulana Dost Muhammad Shahid (who worked at Khilafat Library, two blocks from our new house in the Foreign Missionaries' Colony where we moved in 1983[7]). Every time I saw him, he would ask me what would my age be in the year 2000 when people around the world would be flocking to Ahmadiyyat. Will I be ready to accept the hordes of non-Ahmadis desperately looking for anyone knowledgeable enough about Ahmadiyyat to save their souls? The fact that the world was going to be saved through Ahmadiyyat was not in any doubt. What was doubtful was whether we, as individuals, were willing to play our role (and gain salvation for ourselves). At the daily religious lectures that were delivered following the evening prayers at our neighbourhood mosque, at our weekly *Atfal* (Young Ahmadi Boys' Association) meetings, at the yearly Quranic-education classes, and at the Annual Ahmadiyya Conventions, we were routinely told about the success that Ahmadi missionaries, such as Abbijan, were having in converting non-Ahmadis to Ahmadiyyat around the world. This success proved that God was on our side.

While both my "dads" were proudly faithful Ahmadis, their faith-styles differed from each other. Abbijan had the cerebral faith of a born-again scholar, having heard God's calling after studying and teaching science for years. My father had spent seven years in Jamia Ahmadiyya Missionary School learning the minutia of theological arguments. He had travelled around the world engaging people of all faiths in religious debates. This set him apart from most other Ahmadis (such as my Abbaji) who hadn't read all the books of Hadith or Ahmadiyya doctrine or traveled widely but had a strong emotional attachment to the Jama'at and a firm belief in the supernatural. This included a belief in the miraculous powers of the Khalifa and an irrational reverence for anyone (such as the family of the founder of the Ahmadiyya Jama'at) or anything connected to the founder of the Ahmadiyya Jama'at. My grandfather would get extremely upset if he heard anyone say anything that he perceived as insulting

towards a member of the *khanidan* (hundreds-strong progeny of the founder of the Ahmadiyya movement who lived in a gated area in central Rabwah).

Similar to most devoted Ahmadis, my grandfather endeavored to give ever more of his meagre resources to the community. Not content with contributing the obligatory 1/16th of his modest government pension to the movement, Abbaji wrote to Hazoor to grant him permission to donate 1/8th. Once he was allowed to do that, he wrote another letter asking for permission to contribute 1/4th of his income. Once that request was granted, he asked the proportion to be increased to 1/3rd. Hazoor, to his credit, denied that request. Abbaji refused to take 'no' for an answer and kept writing (to be more accurate, he kept asking me to write because by this time he was too old the write) until he had his way. Had he lived longer, I'm sure he would've requested permission to donate ½ of his income and eventually all of it! In 1979, when the third Ahmadi Khalifa (grandson of the founder of the movement who reigned from 1966 to 1982) launched the decade-long campaign to raise funds to celebrate the centennial of the founding the Ahmadiyya movement in 1889, Abbaji sold his house in Gojra and donated the entire proceeds to the Ahmadiyya Centennial Fund. I don't think I ever saw him happier than he was on the day he received an invitation to a private meeting of major donors with Hazoor. He had my mom put starch on his new *shalwar kameez* (long shirt and tunic) and his white turban that he proudly wore to the meeting with Hazoor. His face beaming with happiness at the prospect of being able to spend time in the physical presence of God's infallible regent on earth.

While I barely knew my absent father, my grandfather was my role model. Like him, I would get up well before sunrise to offer the optional *tahajjud* prayer. I prayed for Allah to make me a success both in the secular and the spiritual world, like my Abbaji. I wanted to be ready to play my part in God's plans for the end times. During the Jalsa when we had a house full of relatives from across Pakistan, I led everyone in the ritual prayers, just as Abbaji often did at our neighbourhood mosque. I read the Quran (first in Arabic and then in translation in Urdu), first from Abbaji, and then from Moulana Zakriya Khan Sahib–the community's official Albanian language translator. I read the books by the founder of the community and his successors (i.e., the Khalifas). I eagerly enrolled in the annual *Talim-ul-Quran* (Quranic-education) classes and took part in competitions of religious knowledge, rhetoric, and Arabic recitation. Above all, as did my Abbaji, I internalized being a good believer as a critical part of my identity. I still remember some of the verses of my favourite childhood poem that I used to sing to anyone who would listen:

hum Ahmadi bache hain kuch kar ke dikha dain gay [we're Ahmadi kids, we will do something big]

shaitan ki hakumat ko dunia se mita dain gay [we will abolish Satan's government from the earth]

aey Shad guman mat kar, kamzor nahin hain hum [don't worry for us, we are not weak]

jab waqt para hum apni janain bhi ganwa dain gay [when the time comes we'll even sacrifice our lives]

hum Ahmadi bache hain kuch kar ke dikha dain gay [we are Ahmadi kids, we will do something big]

Islam ko dunia main mehboob bana dain gay [we will make Islam everyone's beloved religion]

I think I was seven when I memorized the whole poem and sang it for a delighted Abbaji, who kissed me on the forehead.He had the face of a revolutionary filled with the satisfaction of having passed his revolution to his "son."

I always sided with my grandfather when, on occasion, his strict interpretations of Islam, contradicted with, what seemed to me back then, relatively more liberal interpretations of my parents. My mother enjoyed listening to Indian and Pakistani songs on radio when she cleaned the house. This used to irk Abbaji who often found the lyrics to be lewd and distasteful. According to him, the only acceptable use of a radio was to listen to news (Radio Pakistan news and BBC Urdu service news that came at the turn of every hour). As his eyesight became weaker, I became his eyes and hands. I mastered the fine art of tuning the radio to receive the hard-to-catch BBC Urdu signal. I also decided to do a bit of research at the Jama'at library and found *ahadith* (sayings of the prophet Muhammad) expressing displeasure with music. With Abbaji's approval, I plastered handwritten notes with these ahadith all over our house in Rabwah. I did the same thing at the missionary's quarters in Karachi in 1979 posting anti-smoking ahadith everywhere when I heard that my father enjoyed an occasional cigarette when he was alone (he never smoked in front of us). On such occasions, my parents made fun of my overly dogmatic attachment to religion by calling me a "moulavi" (i.e., an Islamic cleric) and "imam-manja" (i.e., the prayer leader of the beds"). At other times, when I was not annoying them with my self-righteousness, they asked me to pray for them because they said God especially listened to my prayers. Somehow I had acquired the identity of being the most devoted Ahmadi in a family of extremely devoted Ahmadis.

Ahmadis believe that "belief in a living God" who talks back when people call on him distinguishes them from non-Ahmadi Muslims who believe that God has only communicated with holy personages in the past. Cultivating an active communicative relationship with God is an aspirational goal for all Ahmadis. From my grandfather, I also inherited the sense of a personal relationship with God. Throughout my childhood I felt that not only was God listening to my prayers but that he was also actively telling me things by showing me his signs. One of the signs of God's special favours for me was shown to my eighth grade public school teacher, Master Nazeer Sahib. Just a month or so before our dreaded Middle School Standard Exams, our homeroom teacher at the Talim-ul-Islam School, called me to the front of the class to tell the whole class about a supernatural experience that he had had in the early hours of that morning in February 1983. He said that as he was walking in the dark from his house to the mosque for the morning prayers, he heard a distinct voice saying "Muhammad Afzal, scholarship." This, he said, was Allah himself foretelling him that not only would I top my competitors in Section A but that I was destined to score high enough marks to earn the coveted government scholarship in high school. The fact that the prophecy

revealed to Master Nazeer Sahib came true and I won top positions in middle school, and then high school and college, as well as in the religious competitions organized by the community[8] only reinforced my identity as God's chosen one. Growing up poor on the mean streets of Rabwah without an older brother or a protective father, I found security in the belief that I could always count on Allah. It was comforting to know that there was someone there who always had my back. I wish that I could describe in words the sense of purpose, meaning, and joy that comes from knowing that you have a direct channel of communication with the creator and all-powerful lord of the universe.

Sometimes, late at night, especially when I'm having trouble going to sleep, I think about how I lost that feeling and I cannot point to any single event but I think that it all started with the typical teenage rebellion and Abbaji's passing away in 1989 (the Ahmadiyya centenary year that he had so longed to see). My grandfather's death was one of many factors (including an opportunity for my mother to take early retirement with government pension, a decline of Rabwah's status as a mecca for Ahmadis following Hazoor's move from Rabwah to UK in 1984, and general economic malaise in Pakistan which made moving to the West a trend among Pakistani Ahmadis) that convinced my parents that we should join our father in Canada. As luck would have it, by the time, we got our immigration papers and arrived in Saskatoon, Canada, Jama'at had decided to send Abbijan back to Africa (this time to the small West African country of Gambia). This meant that as I arrived in Canada I had to find my own way in a radically different world.

Saskatoon of the early 1990s seemed as different a place from Rabwah as possible. When we arrived there in December 1990, streets were covered with some white powder (locals called it "snow") instead of the brown dirt that littered Rabwah's streets. When the sun came out, the weather got colder and not warmer. People drove on the right side of the road and not the left side. People called football "soccer" and they called something resembling group-wrestling football. Women had shorter hair and wore more revealing clothes than men. Everything seemed upside down. The most bewildering thing was that this opposite-world somehow seemed to work better. My father put it best when he said that if the hadith "cleanliness is half the faith" is to be believed then clearly Canadians are better Muslims than Pakistanis! Many of the egalitarian ideals that Ahmadis claimed to aspire to, such as justice and equality of the rich and poor, seemed closer to being met in the West than they ever were in Rabwah. Instead of finding any Western converts (that I expected to find given what we were told in Rabwah about the success of Ahmadi missionary efforts in the West), the only Canadian Ahmadis, I met were Pakistani Ahmadis who had immigrated to Canada. Instead of finding droves of non-Ahmadis wanting to convert to Ahmadiyyat, I found Canadians, by and large, apathetic to the message of Ahmadiyyat and Islam. Instead of finding immorality, injustice, and moral filth in the West (as proclaimed by Ahmadi leaders as well as by many other Pakistanis) I found the West to be a pretty nice place to live. All of that shook up my worldview and made me question that maybe

everything I was told was not as true as I thought that it was. This made me open to the West's liberal narrative that the road to egalitarianism rests on a foundation of constantly questioning authority and not in blindly following it.

When I enrolled in the University of Saskatchewan's computer science program, I was required to take social science courses to fulfil my breadth requirements. I chose Philosophy and Anthropology classes. I found the social science and humanities approach of adopting multiple perspectives quite refreshing. This was opposite to the experience of many of my fellow computer science students who were baffled by the lack of consensus among social scientists on issues of fundamental importance to the disciplines. Afflicted by typical immigrant fears of not finding a job, I just could not muster the courage needed to change my major to social sciences. After completing my PhD in Computer Science, however, I continued my own reading of Psychology, Anthropology, and Philosophy while working as a computer scientist. The more I read about the theory of evolution, the less certain I became of the traditional Islamic explanations for the beginning of life and human existence.

Most of the Ahmadis who move to the West do not go through this transition and I have often wondered why not? Why do people continue to hold blind faith in cult leaders in an era of instant information and social media? I have spent most of my adult life contemplating these questions as well as other questions that my friends and family ask me. Not a day passes by that my mother, my in-laws, my siblings, or my friends don't ask me as to why I am not as active in the Ahmadiyya community as I used to be during my childhood. Why don't I take a place of honour, distinction, and leadership in the community that my talents and lifetime of achievements would surely bring me? My family and friends genuinely do not understand how I could have so easily given up the blessings of Ahmadiyyat and lost my enthusiasm for "true Islam." My scientific colleagues, on the other hand, do not understand how and why any rational person could believe in cultish ideas such as those proclaimed by the founder of the Ahmadiyya Community and held in such high esteem by most of my family and friends. Only simpletons can be brainwashed by cult leaders into blindly following them, argue my scientific colleagues. This book is both a deeply personal account of my struggle to find answers to these puzzling questions and a scientific account of why new religious movement founders come up with their counterintuitive ideas and why others accept them and join new religious movements.

1.1 Ahmadiyya Muslim Community

The founder of Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, was born in the Punjabi village of Qadian around 1839. He was the younger son of the village chief, Mirza Ghulam Murtaza. His family was part of the Central Asian armed bands that moved eastward to India along with Mughals who ruled India for centuries before losing most of their territory to Marathas and Sikhs in the eighteenth century.

Ahmad's family lost their estate (including their ancestral home in their capital of Qadian) to the Sikhs, only to be allowed back around the time of Ahmad's birth. By the time Ahmad was ten, the Sikh rule over Punjab ended marking the culmination of the Anglo-Sikh wars of 1846-49. After the British crushed the 1857 mutiny of Indian soldiers, a quick restoration of Muslim dominance over India seemed impossible. The British occupation also hastened the pace at which Punjab was exposed to new ideas and technologies. These included schools and colleges that taught an ever-larger number of Indians how to read and write and new technologies such as the printing press that allowed mass production of books, pamphlets, and journals in English as well as local languages, particularly Urdu.

Ahmad, as the younger son of a feudal family, was well positioned to become an early adopter of the new media because he had the luxury of time and money. Ahmad, while in his thirties, started writing articles defending Islam against objections by Hindu revivalist movements and Christian missionaries. These efforts were lauded by the small literate Indian Muslim elite. This encouraged Ahmad to dream big and launch the ambitious project of publishing a 50-volume book series that would comprehensively rebut all Hindu and Christian arguments against Islam. The first volume of the series, *Braheen-e-Ahmadiyya*, published in 1884, stated that the goal of the series was to establish Islam's superiority over all other religions (particularly Christianity and Hinduism). One of Ahmad's key arguments was that, unlike Christianity and Hinduism, Islam endowed its faithful followers with the ability to communicate with a living God who supported them through his signs. Ahmad offered evidence of this in his own dreams that had come true and that divine revelations he had received about many future events, including the death of his father. Ahmad challenged Hindus and Christians to come to Qadian and live there at his expense for at least a month so that they could witness firsthand how God still showed his signs through him. While some Muslim clerics were bothered that Ahmad was claiming too much spiritual powers (especially the power to show miracles) for himself, others lauded Ahmad's noble attempts to defend Islam at his own expense. Either way, Ahmad was unapologetic in insisting that he was doing all this only to prove Islam's superiority and to save Muslims from converting to Hinduism and Christianity.

In the late 1880s Ahmad came to believe that Christianity was the bigger threat facing Islam and that traditional Islamic doctrine had left Islam vulnerable to Christian attacks. He believed that these doctrines needed to be reformed. Ahmad blamed the Muslim belief in Jesus having escaped crucifixion by being raised to heaven as the key culprit. He said that Evangelical missionaries were arguing that this showed that Jesus was superior to Muhammad, who lay buried underground in Medina. Missionaries reminded Muslims of their own eschatological beliefs in Jesus' physical descent from heaven towards the end of times to bolster their arguments for the superiority of Jesus over Muhammad. Ahmad claimed that God had told him that Jesus had survived the indignity of crucifixion and had traveled to India where he died a natural death. Furthermore, he said that since the old Jesus was dead and

could not return, God had appointed him as the Messiah of the end times because he was similar to Jesus in many ways. These claims lost Ahmad any remaining support among Muslim notables who now almost uniformly criticized him as an innovator and a false prophet. Ahmad felt the need to call on his supporters to sign a formal oath of allegiance to him. Such oaths had traditionally been used by Sufi teachers to formally accept those seeking to learn from them as their students. Forty people gathered in the Punjabi city of Ludhiana on the morning of March 23, 1889 at the house of one of Ahmad's supporters to sign their pledges. A decade later he asked his followers to register themselves as *Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama'at*[9] in the 1901 India census, cementing their status as a distinct religious community.

Ahmad made paying 1/16th of one's income as a condition of membership in the Jama'at and established organizational offices (called *sadr-anjuman*) in Qadian to administer the funds. He established a press in Qadian that published Urdu and English periodicals and books. He also established the tradition of holding annual Ahmadiyya conventions (called *Jalsa Salana*) in Qadian in December. Despite almost universal opposition by Muslim clerics, or perhaps because of it, Ahmad continued to gather new converts. He claimed thousands of middle class followers by the time of his death in 1908.

Ahmad's best friend, and his biggest financial benefactor, Hakeem Nur-ud-Din, assumed Jama'at's leadership following Ahmad's death as the first Ahmadi Khalifa. After Nur-ud-Din's death in 1914, the community split up into two factions. While Ahmad's son Bashir-ud-Din Mahmud Ahmad assumed the role of the second Khalifa of the larger faction of Ahmadis who stayed in Qadian, a smaller number of Ahmadis moved to Lahore and set up a rival faction. The Ahmadiyya Muslim Movement of Lahore claimed that Ahmad was not a prophet but a lower-ranked reformer (called *mujaddid*) and hence he should not be succeeded by a Khalifa but by an administrator. When the British partitioned their South Asian colony in 1947 into Pakistan and India, Qadian fell on the Indian side of the border. This forced the Qadian faction to move their headquarters to Pakistan (first to Lahore and then to Rabwah). After Bashir-ud-Din's death in 1966, his eldest son Mirza Nasir Ahmad assumed the role of third Khalifa. On September 7, 1974, Pakistan's parliament unanimously adopted the second amendment to the constitution to declare Ahmadis non-Muslims. On Nasir Ahmad's death in 1982, his step-brother Mirza Tahir Ahmad became the fourth Khalifa. On April 26, 1984, Pakistan's military dictator issued an ordinance (later approved by Pakistan's parliament) which made Ahmadiyya proselytization (an integral part of the faith) a crime punishable by a jail term and a fine. Three days later, Tahir Ahmad moved to London to avoid prosecution under the new law. In 1989, he dissolved all international Ahmadi organizations formerly headquartered in Rabwah and moved many Jama'at offices to Tillford, UK[10]. Upon his death in 2003, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad's great grandson, Mirza Masroor Ahmad became the fifth Khalifa. He resides in London, UK.

Table 1 shows key differences between Ahmadiyya doctrine and mainstream Sunni Muslim doctrine. Table 2 show a brief timeline of key events in Ahmadiyya history.

Table 1: A summary of key doctrinal differences between mainstream Sunni Muslims and Ahmadi Muslims

Issue	Mainstream Sunni Muslim Position	Ahmadiyya Position
Who is Allah's final prophet on earth?	Muhammad was the final prophet of God. There can be no prophet after him.	There are two different types of prophets: those who bring a new religious system (i.e., a *shariah*) and those who come to restore an old one. While Muhammad was the final law-bearing prophet, Ahmad was only a reformer prophet who came to restore the true Islam.
Was Jesus (whom all Muslims consider to be a prophet) raised to heaven alive?	Yes. God saved Jesus from the indignity of crucifixion by raising him to heaven while he was still alive and by making someone else look like him. The lookalike was hanged on the cross.	No. Jesus was the one who was hanged on the cross but he only suffered minor injuries. He recovered and traveled to India to continue his mission to the lost tribes of Israel who lived in Afghanistan and Kashmir. He died at the age of 120 and is buried in Srinagar, India.
When will Jesus return to earth?	Jesus is alive in heaven. He will descend from the heaven towards the end of times to fight the anti-Christ and establish Islam as the dominant religion worldwide.	Jesus is dead & will never return to earth. The Messiah whose return in prophesized in *Ahadith* is someone who is similar in character to Jesus. The Jesus-like Muslim Messiah will fight the anti-Christ and establish Islam as the dominant religion.
Who is the Imam Mahdi?	Jesus and Imam Mahdi will be two different people. Jesus, similar to other Muslims, will follow Imam Mahdi as his guide. Neither leader has appeared yet.	Imam Mahdi and Jesus were supposed to be the same person. Both these prophecies were fulfilled in the person of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad- the founder of the Ahmadiyya Jama'at.

Table 2: A timeline of key events in Ahmadiyya history

Date	Event
1831	Syed Ahmed Barelvi, whom some Indian Muslims considered Mahdi is slain by the Sikhs during a battle at Balakot
1839[11]	Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (MGA), founder of Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama'at is born
1846-49	Anglo-Sikh wars won by the British result in the British takeover of Punjab
1854	MGA is married by his parents to his cousin from whom he has two sons
1857	The mutiny of Indian soldiers claiming to restore the last Mughal King in Delhi is crushed and the King is exiled to Burma. Queen Victoria assumes direct control of India
1876	MGA's father, Mirza Ghulam Murtaza, dies in Qadian
1879	MGA announces the launch of his "Braheen-e-Ahmadiyya" book series